

In & of the Pathology Confir^{nt}

THE

MEDICAL PROFESSION

IN

ENGLAND.

LONDON:

HATCHARD AND SON, PICCADILLY.

MDCCCXXXIV.

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“THE EARL OF DURHAM rose to present a Petition, of which he had given notice on Monday evening, from a great number of Physicians practising in London, and who are Licentiates of the College of Physicians. They prayed for an inquiry into the state of the medical profession and the College of Physicians. They objected to the by-law which the College had ordained, by which they were precluded from certain rights and privileges which they felt they had a right to claim, and they called for an inquiry into the subject and a remedy for the grievances of which they complained. He had also a petition to present from certain country physicians, surgeons, and apothecaries, also demanding inquiry and redress. The first petition was signed by 76 licentiates, being more than one-half the number practising in London. According to the College List of 1832, there were 126 fellows, and 272 licentiates. Of the fellows, 65 practised in

London, of the licentiates 138, making a total of 203. Of these 203, only 108 practised in London. This, it was contended, was a very inadequate number of medical practitioners of the first class for so large a population. In Berlin, where the population was 249,000, the number of physicians was 228; in Paris, where the population was 935,000, the number was 925; while in London, where there was a population of 1,500,000, the number was 203, and of those only 108 practised in London and ten miles round. In Berlin there were 174 surgeons and apothecaries; in Paris 159; in London 2000. Now the question was whether the public should not have the benefit of the best possible advice and upon the most extensive scale. In the country, there were about 150 physicians belonging to the College practising, of whom 25 only were licentiates. That was the number for all England and Wales. The petitioners complained of another part of the law, by which no person could practise as a physician in London, or within ten miles of it, unless he was examined before the College of Physicians. Now as it was necessary,

prior to that examination, that the applicant should have been a member of Oxford or Cambridge, many individuals were precluded from appearing. The petitioners alleged that the charter under which the College had been instituted was not strictly attended to. They alleged that in 200 years, during which the College had existed, it had produced only 18 volumes ; whilst the Medical and Chirurgical Societies on the Continent had, in the last 30 years, sent forth 80. The petitioners observed, that the public had been greatly injured by the existing system, and they felt convinced that a great deal of good would result from its alteration, since many of those who were now excluded from that extensive practice which they had a right to claim, were perfectly skilled in their profession *.”

IN the report of this speech of his Lordship, there are evidently some trifling errors as to numbers, which do not, however, affect the argument : the observations themselves, together with the assertion recently made by an honourable member of the House of Commons, that the science of medicine in

* Times, Friday, March 14, 1834.

this country, as compared with its condition on the Continent, is in a state of the greatest barbarism,—embrace the principal charges lately brought against the College of Physicians, both in and out of Parliament. It is the purpose of the present pamphlet to examine them, and see if they are founded in truth.

A grave answer to the last astounding assertion will scarcely be expected, for every man of common sense will naturally ask himself the following question—If physic be really at so low an ebb in England, and its practitioners so very ignorant and unskilful, how comes it that almost all families of distinction, on going abroad, take with them medical men of their own choice and of their own country? Besides, how does it happen that English physicians establish themselves in Rome, Florence, and other great cities on the Continent, expressly to attend the English absentees frequenting and living in these places, who are shrewd enough not to employ and pay them higher fees, if they thought the native doctors were better?

The inference drawn from the greater number of physicians abroad than in England, in proportion to the population of the

capitals of France and Prussia, is very singular. It may be true that there are more persons called *médecins* in Paris, than here in London, and fewer apothecaries in comparison, but surely no one will be deceived by a name ? What is meant by a physician in England is a very different person from him who is so designated on the Continent. For physicians, in the present English acceptance of the term, the demands of the public are not great : but if men are called doctors abroad who, having had the education of apothecaries, are content with the remuneration of apothecaries, their number will necessarily be great ; but call themselves what they will, they are in fact minor practitioners. Any forcible attempt on the part of the legislature to bring about such a change here would probably be impracticable, so long as the country retained the least trace of civilization and intellectual superiority. The very idea reminds one of the observations of a recent popular writer, on a similar though more comprehensive scheme among our American brethren.

‘ I shall state a few circumstances which may illustrate the progress and tendency of

‘ opinion among the people of New York. In
‘ that city a separation is rapidly taking place
‘ between the different orders of society.
‘ The operative class have already formed
‘ themselves into a society, under the name
‘ of “*The Workies*,” in direct opposition to
‘ those who, more favoured by nature or for-
‘ tune, enjoy the luxuries of life without the
‘ necessity of manual labour. These people
‘ make no secret of their demands, which,
‘ to do them justice, are few and emphatic.
‘ They are published in the newspapers, and
‘ may be read on half the walls in New
‘ York. Their first postulate is “Equal and
‘ Universal Education.” It is false, they
‘ say, to maintain that there is at present
‘ no privileged order, no practical aristos-
‘ cracy, in a country where distinctions of
‘ education are permitted. That portion of
‘ the population whom the necessity of
‘ manual labour cuts off from the opportu-
‘ nity of enlarged acquirement, is in fact
‘ excluded from all the valuable offices of
‘ the state. As matters are now ordered in
‘ the United States, these are distributed
‘ exclusively among one small class of the
‘ community, while those who constitute

‘ the real strength of the country have
‘ hardly a voice in the distribution of
‘ those loaves and fishes which they are not
‘ permitted to enjoy. There does exist,
‘ then, they argue, an aristocracy of the
‘ most odious kind—an aristocracy of know-
‘ ledge, education, and refinement, which is
‘ inconsistent with the true democratic prin-
‘ ciple of absolute equality.

‘ They pledge themselves, therefore, to
‘ exert every effort, both mental and physi-
‘ cal, for the abolition of this flagrant in-
‘ justice. They proclaim it to the world as
‘ a nuisance which must be abated, before
‘ the freedom of an American be something
‘ more than an empty boast. They solemnly
‘ declare that they will not rest satisfied,
‘ till every citizen in the United States shall
‘ enjoy the same degree of education, and
‘ start fair in the competition for the
‘ honours and offices of the state. As it is
‘ of course impossible—and these men know
‘ it to be so—to educate the labouring class
‘ to the standard of the richer, it is their
‘ professed object to reduce the latter to the
‘ same mental condition with the former ;
‘ to prohibit all supererogatory knowledge ;

' to have a maximum of acquirement, beyond which it shall be punishable to go*.'

Any commentary upon the preceding extract is unnecessary; its application to the present subject is too obvious to require one.

The profession of physic was within the last half century nearly, confined to physicians, surgeons, and apothecaries; viz., to those who prescribed for internal diseases; to those who attended to external diseases, injuries, or casualties, by wounds or accidents occurring to the human body; and in the last place, to those who acted as minor physicians, and attended also to the lighter external injuries. Since that time the pure apothecary has been gradually disappearing, and his place has been taken by the surgeon, who administering physic and other remedies to his patients, has them supplied by the druggist or mere vender of medicines: or instead of employing an apothecary, application is made to a physician, whose prescription is sent by the patient to a druggist instead of to an apothecary, on account of the greater cheapness of the medicine—the advice of the

* Men and Manners in America, vol. i. p. 299

apothecary or minor physician not being required. Thus the extra charge upon medicines by apothecaries, which includes the advice they give, and is an indirect remuneration for the expensive education which they are obliged to go through by the regulations of the Apothecaries' Company, is avoided. This is a subject which the public has regulated for itself, and will regulate again according to some other manner, if a different mode of proceeding should suit their convenience, whatever acts of parliament are made to prevent them. The business of physic is an affair of private life, and all the regulations required are, that the public should be assured that the persons who call themselves by one denomination or another in the profession have proved their competency to the calling they exercise. Beyond this there should be no other control, than that he who has not proved competence should be punished if he acts under the pretence of having obtained his license, and that if he still, notwithstanding, practises, he shall be bound to declare himself an unlicensed practitioner. This will put him in a situation which will prevent his

recovering any demands at law, unless he can prove a special contract, the performance of which, on his part, he will commonly find it difficult to establish. The next question of importance is, how to maintain in a high station the medical character for the benefit of the public, that they may have persons of high abilities, generous and honourable feelings, and of perfect integrity, to whom they may apply for assistance and advice in the most serious distresses of private life. The question for the educated and informed public is not as to mere qualification for the administration of remedies ; but whether they will be honestly and conscientiously administered, and whether the administrator of them is one who, by his conduct and propriety of behaviour, is fit to be the confidential adviser of a family. It will perhaps be said, that we have practitioners of all sorts of great integrity and worth ; and although it must be admitted that there are many of a different description, that the public has the opportunity of judging between them, and will select accordingly. But this judgment it is not easy to acquire ; for the opportunities of obtain-

ing it are not frequent. Few persons employ more than one practitioner at a time, and the knowledge acquired of his want of skill is obtained by pain and suffering. But with whom ought the public to have the opportunity of making the comparison? With the best informed in practice and most elevated by conduct, liberality, and propriety in the various branches of the profession. And how are these to be brought into existence and maintained in their stations? Only by creating a high order of well-educated medical men, bred up in the honourable feelings of gentlemen, with acquirements which belong to the scientific, the literary, and most polished orders of society. To these qualities should be added a deep knowledge of their profession, which depends not upon any manual dexterity, but upon the mind; and this will be best cultivated by those studies in early life that improve the mental faculties, produce enlarged and elevated ideas, and give an extended view of human nature. Few persons can form any judgment of the merit of a practitioner, but by the fortunate result of his practice. Few persons can judge how much illness has been spared them, by the judi-

cious conduct of their adviser at the commencement of a disease. Because they have been ill but a short time, they are apt to suppose their illness to have been but of slight consequence ; and very often will give more credit to a practitioner, who by misconduct at the commencement of a disease has occasioned a serious illness from which the patient has ultimately recovered, than to him who, arresting the progress of a malady, has by his skill reduced it to one of less importance. Is it worth while for the public to know who are least likely to commit this error ? The profession of physic is one of which the public cannot judge with accuracy, and it has been thought advisable by all legislatures, that it should be so far controlled, that a declaration should be made to the public of competent practitioners. "A physician in a great city," said Johnson, "seems to be the mere plaything of fortune ; his degree of reputation is for the most part totally casual : they that employ him know not his excellence, they that reject him know not his deficiency*." If to this caprice, by which it seems that the fortunes of physicians are doomed to be go-

* Life of Akenside.

verned, is to be added the confusion that must result from the abolition of all control and distinction, discriminating the competent from the incompetent, the licensed from the unlicensed ; the public surely will suffer great mischief, and the well-educated physician be treated most unfairly, and with the grossest injustice.

If this control has proceeded farther, as is said to be the case in France, and perhaps in certain parts of Germany, and authorised physicians, surgeons, and apothecaries have been allotted by the government to towns and districts,—the consequence has been that, though provision of advice has thus been made, the individuals provided have, either by money, favour, or some other arts, obtained their situations, rather than by merit. No opportunity of comparison with other men has been allowed, no stimulus to improvement from rivalry has existed,—consequently the practitioners have made no effort at improvement, no extraordinary exertion even when their own judgment and experience may have justified it, lest they should suffer detriment from not having acted *secundum artem usitatam et leges terræ*. This

condition of physic is one of the most abject ; but let it be contrasted with the other extreme.

Let it be supposed, according to the cry of the present day, or to express it more justly, according to the leading feeling in the minds of many, that there should be free trade in every thing ; free trade in the sale of the products of mind as well as of bodily labour. Now if this doctrine be applied to the profession of physic, the argument may be familiarly illustrated in the following manner. The first difficulty that presents itself is, that the purchasers of the article are no judges of it ; they must buy upon confidence therefore ; and confidence is an ingredient that always enhances the price of a commodity,—as is observed in trade, where a dealer in good articles must have a remuneration for their worth, proportionate to the character he bears for supplying no bad materials. Experience has taught mankind, that it is safer and cheaper to deal with such persons in all articles of which purchasers are not perfect judges, than to go to those who profess to sell cheap. The common reason of the world teaches, that, where honesty in

tradesmen is equal, cheap articles must be inferior ; the proverb that *cheap fish stinks* is universally applicable. Now suppose that the practice of physic be reduced to a mere trade for lucre, and it is not difficult to conceive this ; nay, it is the inevitable consequence of bringing all the present denominations of practitioners under one head, and giving them all equal rank. If the man who has studied several years in an university, and qualified himself with every accomplishment which the best education of this country affords, is to be upon the level of a five years apprenticed apothecary, who has lived behind a shop-board, mixed up and dispensed medicines according to the order of his master, attended as many lectures as may enable him to pass an examination, and to be licensed as soon as he has attained the limited age ; why, then, in a few years there will be none but the lower order of practitioners. No man will either pass through the labour, or be at the expense of a better education, if he is neither to have superior station nor superior emolument. Conceive, then, the condition of *gentlemen* in the profession to be at an end, and the

business of physic to have become a mere trade, in which there is a competition of tradesmen to supply the article of advice (and, let it be remembered, in the most anxious and dangerous conditions of life) at the cheapest rate. Bear in mind also, that the article sold to you, is one of which you are no judge: what happens? The informed and educated man, if such remain in existence, having become a mere trader, at once makes the best market of his article that he can, and having no longer any feeling of professional character, deals with his patients as he would do upon a bargain of timber or of coals. Fears, anxieties, distressed feelings of relations, the miseries of sickness to the sufferer, are ample opportunities for making great bargains with individuals. A person of reputation for the cure of diseases under this free-trade system would not only have no scruples, but would think he did not do himself justice if he forbore to take advantage of such opportunities; as he who dealt in timber or in coals would avail himself of the rise in the market, to sell his goods. This is but a short hint at the evils of such a change—add to them another.

The charitable assistance which is afforded by all branches of the profession to the poor, or to persons in indifferent circumstances, would at once be stopped. For that high character for benevolence which has been cultivated in the profession of physic from the commencement of the institution of the college, and has, by the example afforded, been diffused to all branches of medical practitioners, and raised the whole of the profession to a higher state and condition in England, than in any other country in Europe,—will be lost. Each individual will consider that his advice and medicine is his stock in trade against such competition as will not allow him to dispose of any of it in charity, lest he lose his daily bread. The probable result of such a state of things, or of any change approaching to it, would be that the lowest orders of society would be worse off than at present, the middle and upper ranks imposed upon, and obtain assistance in their calamities at an exorbitant price.

The provisions in existence for proving the qualifications for practice in the respective

branches of the profession, are the Acts of Parliament of Henry VIII. for Physicians, the Charter of the College of Surgeons for Surgery, and the Act 55 George III. for Apothecaries.

PHYSICIANS.

By the Acts of Henry VIII., the College of Physicians are directed to appoint annually four persons to examine all who propose to practise as physicians in London, and license them. All persons practising as physicians without this license are subject to a penalty of five pounds a month, to be recovered by an action at common law by the college. This, which was a heavy fine, when the Act of Parliament was passed, is at the present day trifling, and has (from the expenses of litigation to the funds of the college, which are scarcely equal to the support of the institution) stood in the way of the assertion of the law of late years, unless it has been very openly and publicly violated.

SURGEONS.

No one is prohibited from practising sur-

gery, or acting as a surgeon, by law. The regulations of the army and navy have made it compulsory upon the individuals employed in this branch to pass an examination before the College of Surgeons. All other persons may practise surgery, without passing such examination ; to which, if they submit themselves, it is a voluntary act.

APOTHECARIES.

By the Act 55 George III., all apothecaries dispensing medicines for the cure of disease, and making up the prescriptions of physicians, must be examined before the Society of Apothecaries.

For general practitioners as apothecaries or surgeons, who practise the branches of physic, surgery, and midwifery conjoined, and have given themselves this name by way of distinction, there is no specific examination ; but as dispensers of medicine, and as practitioners of physic, or not dispensing medicines themselves, but employing a druggist, (from whom many of them are said to receive a profit upon the medicines ordered,) they are bound to pass an ex-

amination before the Apothecaries' Company, and usually undergo one before the College of Surgeons.

This is the present state of the profession in England; it is proposed to alter it. What may be considered grievances among the surgeons and apothecaries, it is not intended to state now, and what changes are in contemplation with respect to them cannot be anticipated. As to the College of Physicians, the alleged grievances are contained in the petition presented by the Earl of Durham. It is there stated, that there are only about 200 physicians in London, and that in Paris there are 900 of that denomination, for a population not much above half the amount of that of the metropolis of England. It has been said also, that there are less than 200 apothecaries in Paris, and that the number in London is 2000. The question might briefly be answered, by asking in which of these capitals is the practice of physic the most respectable? But the petitioners omitted to state, that in Paris an apothecary is confined to the sale of medicines, and is not allowed to administer

them. Did the gentlemen state to his Lordship, when they requested him to present their petition, that they desired that physicians should be created of equal condition with themselves, to supersede the 2000 apothecaries, and that they were willing to take their place, to execute all the subordinate duties performed by them, and to receive their smaller emoluments ? Did they say that they were willing to receive the poor remuneration, which the degraded state of those who bear the name of physicians in Paris allots to them ? They, forsooth, had, in their liberal views of serving the public, a notion that 2000 persons receiving emoluments for their visits, such as they themselves are used to obtain, were to be created at once ; or supposed that, because they had not hitherto been created, there was a fault in the legislature, and in the medical institutions of the country. Let them be asked, whether they are willing to be apothecaries ; if they are, the line is open to them. If so, they must be content with the emoluments of apothecaries. The reward being small, the expenses of education must be small, and the knowledge to be acquired will in pro-

portion be small also. Parents will not employ great expense in bringing up children to an art in which the prospect of gain is inconsiderable. Do the gentlemen petitioners not see, that if their new order of things be adopted, it will reduce the whole class of physicians here, to that of their so much envied position in Paris, where it is notorious to all the English who are acquainted with that capital, that they rank much below the apothecaries in this country? If they are really serious in their demands, what can be said of physicians who, in the view they take of their own profession, have neither forethought nor sagacity—but propose a scheme by which they would degrade the class in which they exist, in order to be revenged for an ideal injury, upon those who in reality have raised them and do still support them in their situation of respectability?

The plan proposed by some, that there should be a Board, consisting of all branches of the profession, viz., physicians, surgeons, and apothecaries, to examine and license all medical men, is absurd enough. The Board indeed, to use a homely simile, may furnish joiners and carpenters, but will supply no

cabinet-makers, nor call into existence any architects, who will understand the difficulty or intricacy of disease, as it affects the complicated machinery of the human frame.

The petitioners complain, that they are precluded from certain rights and privileges, which they are entitled to claim. They accuse the College of having endeavoured to limit the number of licensed physicians, and the examiners (Censors' Board) of having rejected persons improperly. The one accusation must rest upon the other, for every man having the not exorbitantly demanded qualifications* for a licence is at liberty to apply for examination, and if he passes it, receives his licence to practise. The accusation, therefore, resolves itself into the question of the undue severity of the Censors' Board towards such individuals. Let the annals be searched for the numbers rejected ; let the names of the persons who complain,

* The qualifications to be licensed, are a residence of two years at *any* University, a degree of Doetor of Physic, and the passing of a competent examination : not, as was stated in the petition to the House of Lords, that the applicant should be a graduate of Oxford or Cambridge, a condition whieh the petitioners ought assuredly to have known that the College never has and never could have demanded, being illegal and contrary to the Charter.

or who are complained for by their friends, be brought forward, during the last twenty years; the president and censors are alive, and will give abundant testimony of good reasons for their rejection. Any accusation of malversation of office, or any neglect of enjoined duties, which the College has been competent to perform, they are desirous of having sifted, and will readily meet the inquiry.

But the great grievance after all is the distinction of *Fellow* and *Licentiate* of the College: one of which the public have hitherto heard little, and have still a very imperfect idea. The profession generally in London, perhaps, comprehend something of its meaning, but even their notions are by no means exact. As to the public, whose good opinion is worth having, all they require is, that the physician they send for should be skilled in the treatment of disease, and should speedily relieve them from their pain, and cure the malady under which they labour; for this relief and assistance they are willing to pay a fee. It seldom happens that they send for the College List, to examine whether the doctor is a fellow or a licentiate. How then does it happen that, in this great

metropolis, a large portion of the leading physicians are in the class of fellows? The answer is ready and obvious; they have, almost all of them, been brought up at the English Universities, where, in the course of a liberal and classical education, they have had early opportunities of forming valuable friendships and extensive acquaintances with those destined in after-life to fill high situations in society, with whom they have imbibed the same feelings, formed congenial habits, made similar acquirements in science and literature, and have thus begun the practice of their profession with a large stock of friends, to whose number, by a continuance of good conduct, they have ample means of adding. No alteration in their designation in the College List, whether it be changed to licentiate, or member, would alter or destroy this natural advantage of an English liberal education. But all fellows are not brought up at Oxford and Cambridge; a few are admitted into the fellowship by other modes of election—and with what feelings does the College regard such a preference? surely none of envy or of jealousy. They choose a

man already eminent in his profession ; and by this preference and distinction do not think that they make him a more dangerous rival, but conceive that they only add to the respectability of their own body, at the same time that they pay him a compliment.

The connexion of the College of Physicians with the English Universities is not mentioned in the original Charter, but it has happened that for the last three hundred years, viz., from its very first institution, there has been a constant, uninterrupted communication and bond of union between these learned bodies. The founder and first president of the College was Linacre, who, besides being a professor at Oxford, established medical lectures there. The next distinguished president of the College was Caius, who himself founded and endowed a College at Cambridge. The immortal Harvey, who discovered the circulation of the blood, was for some time the head of one of the colleges at Oxford ; and to those who are conversant with the history of physic in England for the last three centuries, numerous names will readily occur of distinguished fellows of the College of Physicians, who have been medical

professors and teachers at one or other of our great seminaries of learning in England.

The fellow of the College has no advantage whatever over the licentiate, with reference to the public, as has been already shown. As to the College, he differs only in belonging to the body of examiners, and in this capacity he has certain duties to perform, and holds by election certain offices. Of these offices those of president, four censors, treasurer, registrar, and four lecturers, receive emoluments.

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| The President receives . . . | 25 <i>l.</i> | per annum. |
| Each Censor . . . | 20 <i>l.</i> | do. |
| Treasurer . . . | 20 <i>l.</i> | do. |
| Registrar . . . | 40 <i>l.</i> | do. |

Of the four lecturers the two juniors receive 10*l.* each, the senior 32*l.*, and the lecturer upon Materia Medica (who was appointed a few years since only) is paid 20*l.* a year. The salary of the president arises from a benefaction left by the will of Dr. Hamey ; the stipends of three of the lecturers, from benefactions by will of Dr. Gulston, Lord Lumley, and Dr. Crone ; the emoluments of the other College officers are paid out of the funds of the College.

It has been urged as a complaint against the College, that the lectures being confined for the most part to the junior fellows, are generally uninteresting and mere matters of form ; and that it has published very few volumes of Transactions, as compared with those which have been sent forth by other societies. In the first instance, it should be recollected that the College was instituted for the purpose of examining persons who took upon them the office of physicians, and of declaring their qualifications to the public ; that whatever they have done with respect to their literary productions has been voluntary, for the advancement of the knowledge of the profession, and was never enjoined them by their institution. The Royal Society has been, within a few years, superseded in different branches by the formation of other societies ; in the same manner the institution of Medical Societies has diminished the necessity of great exertion on the part of the College in these points. But they were early in the field in the encouragement of such inquiries, have at intervals lent their assistance, and do not yet consider themselves as retired from it. As to its lectures, let it not be forgotten that

it was in delivering the Lumleian Lectures that the great Harvey taught his doctrine of the circulation of the blood. If the Transactions of the College already published be examined, they will be found to contain some of the most important and original papers upon medical subjects that have ever been given to the world.

In a return which the College made to an order of the House of Commons, dated 21st June, 1833, they begged to state—

‘ That, with the exception of a lease of
‘ the ground upon which the building now
‘ stands, the College has never received any
‘ pecuniary aid from the Crown since its found-
‘ ation. The original building for the meet-
‘ ings of the Corporation was purchased and
‘ added to by the private subscriptions of the
‘ fellows of that time ; and when this was
‘ burnt down at the great fire of London, the
‘ edifice in Warwick-lane was built at the cost
‘ of the fellows ; and the funds for the erection
‘ of the present building in Pall-Mall East,
‘ which cost 25,000*l.*, were raised from the
‘ sale of the premises in Warwick-lane, which
‘ yielded 9,000*l.*; from 2,000*l.* given by the

' trustees of Dr. Radcliffe, and from the subscriptions of the present fellows.'

To what, it will be asked, is all this liberality on the part of the College to be attributed? As the actions of men are not generally interpreted too candidly, and the motives of the members of a gainful profession are least likely to be so, it may be proper to beg the favour of the public to believe that all this disinterested conduct has arisen from a noble desire to maintain a liberal profession in a distinguished rank; that there may always be well-instructed men of liberal feelings, who hold a high estimation in the public mind for its benefit and welfare.